

CORRESPONDENCE

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The Next Million Years*

To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—To give you my opinions on Dr. Osborn's address and on Sir Charles Darwin's rejoinder in sufficient detail to avoid misunderstanding would take up more space than I feel is justified. There is, however, one point, already made in part by General Osborn, which I should like to stress in connection with the arguments advanced in *The Next Million Years*. Sir Charles Darwin regards it as inevitable that, owing to pressure of population on the world's resources, poverty will continue to be the lot of the great majority of the human race: for, so his argument runs, countries taking active steps to limit their populations will in the long run be swamped by their more prolific neighbours. This assumes that heavily over-populated countries with a large section of their population living in poverty will necessarily be at a competitive advantage in relation to countries where population is in better balance with available natural resources. But is this the case, or if it has been so in the past, will it continue to be so? It seems to me that the scientific revolution which is now taking place will shift the balance further in favour of the technically highly organized communities with their almost inevitably higher minimum standard of living, and away from mere numbers.

This, of course, will be of no avail if technically advanced communities contain the seeds of their own decay. That such tendencies at present exist, and that many of them are genetic in origin, I would be the last to deny. As yet we have only a rudimentary understanding of the phenomena involved, but with the development of the biological sciences (using the term in its widest sense) this situation is likely to change rapidly. To assume that no solution will ever be found is surely, in the light of all that mankind has already achieved, unduly pessimistic.

Once a solution has been found we may expect it to be maintained, for the communities that adopt it, even if in part for irrational reasons, will be at an undoubted and continuing advantage relative to those who do not.

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To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—Sir Charles Darwin takes issue with Mr. Frederick Osborn on whether or not birth control can be regarded as a cure for over population, choosing, himself, to regard it as only a palliative. The time factor and the psychological factor seem

to be the operative questions, and on the former I would side with Mr. Osborn. We cannot think realistically about more than the next 80 years or so. Within this span it seems reasonable to hope that a real reduction in "improvident maternity," plus an increase of world food supplies, may so alter the problem of over population that future generations will have entirely new ideas, and will view Sir Charles' pessimism with incredulity. (The fact that 70 per cent of Indian village women in a recent sample survey wanted to "plan" their families, and the vital statistics of France and the U.S.A. since the war, support this view.)

But when Darwin implies that Osborn is a starry-eyed idealist because he does not take psychological factors into account, I am inclined to agree with him. Osborn seems unduly optimistic that Planned Parenthood can be spread in the "right" way. Let us assume he is right, however, and that the "dreadful burden of over population" can be lifted in two or three generations. If this new stability is to be maintained in the largest centres of world population, and if the even greater hope of race improvement is to be approached, great changes will have to occur in the external and internal conditions of men and women. The organisers of Planned Parenthood need to think deeply about what their proposals imply. It may be that the concept of family planning can provide sanctions that would affect human relationships at the deepest level—parenthood, brotherhood, sex. If this were to happen, the new conditions would be invested with that "tremendous quality" for which Sir Charles Darwin rightly, but unhelpfully pleads. If sufficient thought and devotion are given to the carrying out of Planned Parenthood's proposals, there is a small but perfectly good chance that Osborn's hope may be more realistic than Darwin's despair.

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To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—Is it not rather profitless to attempt to appraise the relative merits of General Osborn's address and the book written by Sir Charles Galton Darwin? The General was making an after luncheon speech whereas Sir Charles has written a closely reasoned work of some 200 pages. The General gives entertaining expression to his personal hopes and fears: he is dogmatic and trite, and makes frequent use of the subjunctive mood—all of which is perfectly justified and was indeed desirable for the occasion on which it was used. But it is as impossible to compare Sir Charles Darwin's book with this speech as it is to compare

* EUGENICS REVIEW 45; 161.